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THE WISCONSIN PINERIES

Logging on the Chippewa

James I. Clark

The State Historical Society of Wisconsin

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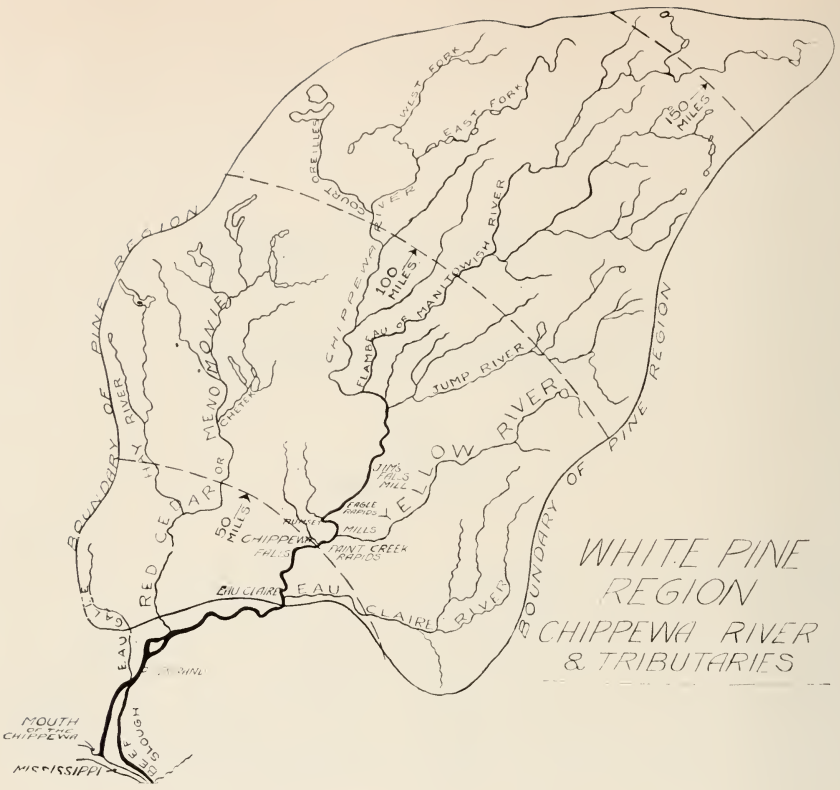
JAMES I. CLARK

WISCONSIN LUMBERJACKS felled and trimmed trees along the Menominee and the Wolf, in the upper reaches of the Wisconsin, on the Black and the St. Croix, and in the valley of the Chippewa. For their twelve to twenty dollars a month plus bed and board the jacks were up and ready for work before dawn and stayed on the job until after dark. They worked six long days a week from frost time til spring thaw, often when the thermometer stood "two feet below zero." And when the day was done, wrote the greenhorn son of a Madison minister in the 1870's,

> We roll into our soft, downy couch of lousy blankets, and lay and listen to the mocking bird, with music by the entire band, and snoring in seven different languages, mostly imported—professional snores from Germany and Norway, warranted never to miss a note . . . while the beautiful odor of wet socks and foot rags is heard in the near distance, and finally fall to sleep to slow music, only to be awakened in a few minutes by the melodious voice of the cook, singing, "roll out your dead bodies, daylight in the swamp," etc. Then we get up and go to our beautiful and sumptuous repast of fricasseed pork and beans on the half shell with a basin of reduced ice water flavored with copperas, and called by the low and uneducated, "tea." Such is life in the woods, but for me, give me six months, twice a year for two years, in Waupun, or some other place of enjoyment.[1]

THE CHIPPEWA VALLEY

That was part of life in the woods. It probably hadn't changed greatly since the King's loggers felled tall white pines on the hillsides of New



England, snaked them out of the woods and sent them 'round the world as the masts of England's merchantmen and men-of-war. Not long after the King lost his title to that pine, men started to clean out the woods in earnest, sending timber down the rushing streams to build houses and cities for the new nation.

In the process of civilizing the land beyond the Alleghenies there was also a lot of building to be done. Many of those who settled the far prairies first tried sod as house material. But they preferred boards when they could get them, and the best available still came from the white pine. That wood split easily and smoothly, was soft and easy to work, yet highly durable. It was used for mansions on the hill, for tenements in the slums, for banks and stores and livery stables, for houses and barns, by the people who settled the cities and farms on the broad and open prairies.

Middlewestern Forests

In Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota white pine grew in abundance. Some had grown in the forests for three hundred years. Some were so gigantic they yielded four to five thousand board feet of lumber. Four of such trees would build a good-sized house. In the 1830's and '40's, as people moved West in ever-increasing numbers, lumbering skills and a ready market were beginning to catch up with the forest kings. The crop was about to be harvested.

In the 1830's Maine and other New England states still produced a lot of lumber, and would for another twenty to thirty years. Yet men familiar with the industry and with an

Running the Kilbourne Dam, Wisconsin River.

eye to the future were drifting west from the Pine Tree State. Some paused momentarily in the forests of western New York and Pennsylvania. Others pushed on, and once they discovered the vast forests that ran from western Lake Erie to the western end of Lake Superior and beyond, they purchased a few thousand acres and hurried home for money and loggers.

By the end of the decade, ads appeared in Maine newspapers:

> WANTED to go West, one first rate head Sawyer, two of the second class, one who understands Circular Saws, and one Teamster. The above to start immediately. Also, in 3 or 4 weeks, a gang of 10 or 12 Wood Choppers, to cut Pine for steam Boats. The best references will be required. Inquire of CHANDLER AND PAINE.[2]

Loggers went north from the lower peninsula of Michigan and into Wisconsin and Minnesota. Axes bit into tree trunks, rivers were choked with logs, and whirring saws built mounds of dust in the river towns. By 1847 there were twenty-four saw-mills on the Wisconsin river, five on the Chippewa and its lower tributaries, and five on the St. Croix. That was scarcely a beginning.

Four years later it was said that Eastern lumber no longer competed with Wisconsin pine on the Mississippi. "The course of the lumber trade may now be considered as permanently changed," wrote one observer. "The pineries of Wisconsin

now control, and will soon hold exclusive possession of the markets of the valley of the Mississippi and its great western affluents."[3]

That meant prosperity and growth for the valley of the Chippewa, which contained one-sixth of all the white pine west of the Appalachians. By 1882 the annual output of the valley was over 600 million board feet. A year later it jumped to over a billion. Wisconsin lumber was used in Missouri, Iowa, Illinois and Kansas, in Nebraska, Texas and as far west as Colorado.

Each year more thousands of acres were logged off and more millions of board feet of lumber came out of sawmills all over Wisconsin. By the end of the century daylight was reflected from stumps on hundreds of thousands of Middlewestern acres that formerly had known only the gloom of the dense forest.

There was waste in the process. But until about the 1880's the forests were considered inexhaustible. The market, except for periodic slumps during times of general depression, continued to expand. And the greatest demand was for the best pine—the straightest, most knotless that could be produced. That meant quite a bit was burned, or left to rot in the woods.

Farmers moving into forested areas applauded the work. Land covered with trees would never produce crops. Beyond what was needed for building and fencing they didn't want the timber. Many farmers pitched in and helped during the winter months, for wages, and thus formed a different class of lumberjacks from the professionals who moved where there were trees, and when they were gone, moved on.[4]

From Forest to Stream

To open a tract of timber for axes and saws, first came the "timber-cruisers," or "land-lookers." Going into the woods the cruiser located one corner of the section according to the government survey. From that he quickly stepped off the other three corners, two thousand paces to the mile in heavily wooded country. Then a two-hundred foot square within the section was paced off, a few trees measured, and the average number of board feet per acre computed. Multiplying by 640 gave the board feet in a section.[5]

After he made his estimate, the timber-cruiser hurried to the nearest land office and entered the acreage for his company. When timber became somewhat scarce, the race for the land office between rival cruisers was close.

Land-lookers were highly skilled. They had to be. Good money was expended on timber they okayed. They couldn't afford many mistakes. Not only did they have to estimate the timber, but also had to know the layout of the streams that could be used to get the timber out.

The logging crew, or "team," came in the fall. First a "shanty" was built, usually a structure about 24 by 36 feet, with sides 3 or 4 feet high. Some were hastily and roughly constructed in the early days. One crew "cut logs for a cabin on Saturday, built it on Sunday, spent Monday storing provisions, and started cutting timber on Tuesday."

The shanty was heated by a big

Crew in the woods.

open fire which was also used for cooking. There the men ate and slept and spent their after-supper hours. A separate building housed the work animals.

Later, when logging crews increased from the early ten or fifteen to over a hundred men, the buildings multiplied and were more elaborate. A stove replaced the open fire and there were blacksmith and carpenter shops, a granary, haysheds, stables, and sometimes a kitchen and a mess hall apart from the bunkhouse.

Choppers were among the aristocrats of the logging team, for not everyone could fell a tree in a high wind and drive a stake into the ground with it. After about 1880 two-man cross-cut saws were used, a deep gouge first being chopped on the side toward which the tree was to fall. Once down, the trees were attacked by "barkers," who trimmed the branches and stripped the bark from one end so the log would slide more easily over the snow.

Ox teams, later horses, snaked the logs over trails cut by "swampers." Often they went on a "go-devil," which was a hardwood crotch in the shape of a wishbone, with a crossbar attached to the two wings. The log rested on the crossbar.

At the logging road, the timber was piled to await pickup by a sled. Loads carried were enormous, one team of horses being able to move anywhere from five to twelve and sometimes even seventeen thousand board feet of logs. There was keen competition to see which camp could send out the largest load. The "record" varied from about 21,000 to 35,000 board feet, depending upon the source one read or listened to.

In the winter, horse-drawn water tanks made periodic trips up and down the logging roads, sprinkling them and packing the grooves. Icy roads made for fast and easier trips, but they also made for occasional trouble. At steep upgrades an extra team was stationed to supply additional power. At sharp downgrades a "road monkey" stayed, to sprinkle

Hauling the logs out.

sand and straw to reduce the speed of descent. That sometimes was not enough. The heavy loads might push the horses too fast, and animals, driver and thousands of board feet of logs would end the trip in a ditch at the bottom of the hill.

If the logs weren't sawed into market length in the woods, they were reduced at the river bank. Lengths varied from 10 to 16 feet. Then the timber was piled along the bank to await the coming of spring.

From River Bank to Sawmill

As the ice broke up, lumberjacks traded their rubbers for calked boots, with many spikes on sole and heel. The spikes were carefully filed to sharp points to dig into the slippery logs. Winter flannels were exchanged for overalls, which were lighter and which dried faster. The winter's work in the woods was finished. The "river pigs" took over.

"Those rivermen were the pick of the camps," wrote one who shepherded many logs downstream. They were

> lumberjacks of unusual strength, agility, daring, and hardihood. They had to be. For days they had to go with but little sleep and with snacks of food snatched whenever and wherever possible. They had to suffer frequent duckings and were almost continually soaked to their skins at a time of year when the weather was still far from clement. The price of their safety was a constant and unfaltering vigilance. They worked in a treacherous element, and the slightest misstep or miscalculation might send them relentlessly to their deaths.

A day's work began in the half-light of morning before sun-up. It ended when logs were only shadows in the stream.

For townspeople along the way, the annual drive was a dramatic event. "The coming of the drive," wrote one who remembered,

> was heralded by various signs, all of them sure and invariable. First were the drums of the logs themselves, upriver, the booming that made your heart beat faster. Then the advance guard—slim, easy-riding logs that somehow had managed to break away and get miles ahead. . . . Soon the logs began coming thicker until you

scarcely could see the water between them. The river became a mass of sluggish bodies, rolling this way and that, grumbling all day and all night. No door could shut out this noise.

There were certain places where the logs were likely to be stopped, and skilled crews were stationed to keep them moving. With all the precautions, pile-ups occurred. Then the men worked feverishly to free the jammed timber. It was important to get to the mills as quickly as possible, to take advantage of high water, and to keep driving expenses at a minimum.

Some jams piled up more than 100 million board feet of timber for miles along the streams. Crowds often flocked to watch rivermen leap nimbly from log to log testing, prying with their long, sharp poles. Wrote one witness,

> Men, women, and children gather on the bank to see the sight; the drivers, in red flannel shirts, dripping wet, shout and labor; the oxen strain and pull; here a log starts; another one is hauled out; slowly the head of the jam gives way; shout upon shout rends the air, and amid the cheers of those looking on and the waving of hats, bonnets and aprons, the jam breaks in front and moves on like an army, to "halt," perhaps within half a mile where the same labor must be repeated.

Some have said the men looked for a key log, the one that had to be moved before the jam would give. Others have said the key log was just the last log moved. "A key log," snorted one old river pig, "Sure, lots of them. Every jam had hundreds of key logs, even thousands of them." On the other hand, an Oshkosh newsman described the cutting of the last log by a twenty-year-old riverman on a jam in 1882:

> He stripped everything, save his drawers. A strong rope was placed under his arms, and a gang of smart young fellows held the end. The man shook hands with his comrades, and quietly walked out on the logs, ax in hand. . . . The man was quietly walking to what might be his death. At any moment the jam might break of its own accord, and also, if he cut the log, unless he instantly got out of the way, he would be crushed by falling timber.
>
> There was a dead silence while the keen ax was dropped with force and skill on the pine log. Now the notch was near half through the log; one or two more blows and a crack was heard. The men got in all the slack of the rope that held the axman; one more blow and there was a crash like thunder and down came the wall, to all appearances on the axman.
>
> Like many others, I rushed to help the poor fellow, but to my great joy I saw him safe on the bank, certainly sadly bruised and bleeding from sundry wounds, but safe.

Others were not so lucky. Only too often, a man jumped too late, and was tossed on the swirling, lashing logs, ground under the white-topped water. That was one of the hazards of the drive. As one experienced man wrote, "A drowning did not even slow up the work. The drive had to go on. No mere human misfortune or agency could stop it. Not even death could stop it."[6]

Jam!

From Sawmill to Market

At sawmill towns like Chippewa Falls and Eau Claire, the logs were caught by booms—obstructions made of logs and timbers that could be moved in and out of the stream—and guided into storage ponds.

Life in the mills was probably dull and monotonous compared with that on the drive. For twelve hours a day the logs kept coming up the ramps, were pushed against the saws, and the lumber carted away. For that labor the common worker got $1 to $1.50 a day. Skilled workers, like sawyers and others, commanded $3 to $4 for a day's work. Sawmill work was regulated by the season, and lasted from the time logs came down in the spring until either the run was finished or the ponds and rivers froze in the fall. It wasn't until railroads penetrated the pineries that sawmills worked the year 'round.

Rough lumber turned out by Eau Claire mills was put together in "cribs" and sent down the Chippewa to markets on the Mississippi. The cribs were constructed by drilling holes in both ends and the middle of two sixteen-foot planks. Into those holes were driven three-foot hardwood "grub pins." Boards were then laid at right angles across the foundation planks, then across those boards until twelve to twenty layers were built up. On top of the boards were placed two more sixteen-foot planks, bored like those on the bottom. When the grub pins were pulled tight the crib was snug and ready to go. It was then sixteen feet long and twelve to sixteen wide. Six or more placed together formed a "rapids piece," or "string," which was the raft that went downriver. On the Mississippi, five or more rapids pieces formed a "Mississippi raft."

Guiding those strings down the river with sixteen-foot "sweeps," or

At the sawmill.

oars attached fore and aft, was a man's work. On a comparatively quiet stream like the Chippewa below Eau Claire the job was not so tough as on the Wisconsin, where there were several rapids and falls to get over and where drownings were all too frequent.

Raft crews received $60 to $90 for from 30 to 50 days' work. Pilots, the ones responsible for safe delivery, commanded top wages. Sometimes they made as much as $1000 during a good season.

Rafting had its disadvantages. It was dangerous. Dropping several feet over falls while trying to keep the clumsy craft off the rocks and remain alive was no summer's cruise. Pounding on rocks and other obstructions did the lumber no good, either. Only too often a raft would get snagged or run aground, break up, and be lost completely.[7]

Difficulties at Beef Slough

Such transportation problems helped make lumbering a rather uncertain business. With most companies transportation represented forty to fifty or more per cent of the total cost of production. An outfit might have a good season's cut held up by jams, and have to sell on a buyer's market because so much other lumber got there first. Another year might bring low water and logs and rafts wouldn't get downstream. Other years might see unusually high, swift water, wiping out dams and storage ponds, resulting in large losses. At market places competition to sell farmers and townspeople was close. Price wars occurred every now and then. As the nineteenth century grew older, land values rose, and it required more and more capital to enter and stay in the lumber business. Many huge fortunes were made

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Working the "sweeps."

from logs, but there is no accurate record of the large number of business failures.

Various attempts were made by loggers to control cutting and regulate prices. Most operators were willing that the cut be reduced, but they wanted the other fellow to do it. Many small companies combined to stay in business. Those with larger capital sought to gain control of as many lumber operations as possible, from owning pine lands to selling on the retail market. By the late 1860's monopoly became an issue in the Chippewa valley.

The prosperity of a city like Eau Claire depended on getting more and more rafts to the Mississippi. Then in the spring of 1868 its livelihood was threatened. Men from eastern Wisconsin and Michigan got together to supply logs to sawmills on the Mississippi. The logs had to go through Eau Claire. The stage was set for trouble.

Several miles downstream, a little below Durand, the waters of the Chippewa split around a little island. The main channel went right. Bearing left brought one into Beef Slough, a sluggish, swampy branch of the main stream that eventually flowed into the Mississippi about six miles north of Alma. Near that island the Beef Slough Manufacturing, Booming, Log Driving and Transportation Company had erected booms. There logs were shunted into Beef Slough, stopped, sorted, and sent to rafting works above Alma. At that place some logs were sawed; others were strung together and sent down the Mississippi to be sawed and marketed in Iowa, Illinois and Missouri.

Eau Claire millowners had long realized the value of Beef Slough as a storage place for logs. A few years earlier they had obtained rights to it from the Wisconsin Legislature, and had built a dam there, sealing off the slough. Beef Slough interests had

Raftsmen at lunch.

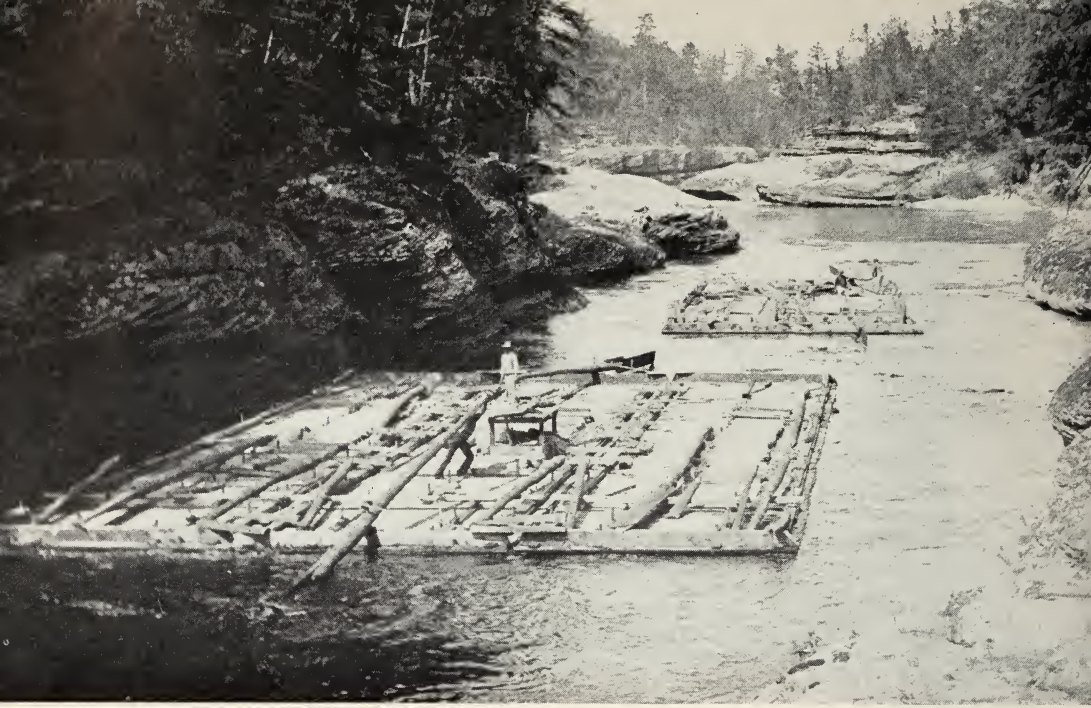
contrived to have the dam removed. Then they got one of the Eau Claire men on their side, who brought with him the charter rights to develop the slough. In the spring of 1868 fifty million feet of logs were contracted for, to be delivered at the storage place down river.

The presence of booming works at Beef Slough meant a decrease of business at Eau Claire. Sawmill owners would have to compete with an outside group when buying logs. Some loggers didn't favor a longer drive, for the chances of losing logs on the way would be increased. Other loggers welcomed the opportunity to sell to the highest bidder, and liked the idea of outside competition. Eau Claire businessmen saw the resources of their area threatened by "foreigners."

Beef Slough supporters, the Eau Claire *Free Press* pointed out, are mostly "foreign capitalists, who . . . entered large tracts of pine lands on the Chippewa [and] now propose to ruin the country by stripping it of its wealth and conveying the same to other States, where . . . manufacturing profits will be realized. . . . On the one side we find the interests of foreign speculators involved. On the other, those of actual residents. Which of the two is our State most indebted to?"

Contracting for 50 million feet of logs was one thing. Getting them safely stored in Beef Slough was another. Claiming they couldn't tell one log, from another, millowners at Eau Claire boomed all that came downstream. Ordinarily in a case like that there would be an exchange of logs. This time there wasn't. The situation grew a little tense.

Organizing a gang of over one hundred toughs, arming them with axes and some with revolvers, the Beef Slough Company struck back. The small army marched up the river and cut Eau Claire booms. One witness reported: "We found Eau Claire badly torn up in mind between the joint forces of Beef Slough and the Mississippi millmen, and the



Rafting on the Wisconsin.

millmen of the City. Some booms had been cut. . . . Revolvers could be seen in the jackets of the lumberjacks, and pike-poles and cant hooks were carried about on the defense"

"Hodgin's & Robbin's Boom Cut! by the Beef Slough Comp'y. 12,000,000 of Logs Turned Out!" screamed the *Free Press* headlines. Millowners responded to the challenge. With the sheriff's aid a posse of over two hundred men was raised. Those customers were just as rough and tough as those on the other side. "Through the persuasive influence of this 'lobby,' armed and equipped, with a determination to protect the manufacturing interests of Eau Claire, a compromise was effected," said the *Free Press*. The boom-cutting gang was allowed to return downstream and the brief "war" was soon over.

The Beef Slough War didn't amount to much—a few booms cut, some logs lost, a few broken heads—but it indicated a new way of dealing with the uncertainties of lumbering. It also marked the rise of Frederick Weyerhaeuser.

Weyerhaeuser came to the United States from southern Germany in 1852. He got into the grain and lumber business at Rock Island, Illinois. By 1870 his company was doing well with two sawmills and he was becoming known as a sound businessman. Realizing the advantages of booming logs at Beef Slough, Weyerhaeuser moved in with the company that had got mixed up with Eau Claire interests in 1868.

Millowners in that city continued to make things difficult for Beef Slough operators. Buying up logs, or just not letting them through, Eau Claire men made it hard for the

booming company to make deliveries on the Mississippi. By 1870, two years after the so-called "war," the Beef Slough Company was ruined.

That didn't mean final victory for Eau Claire, however. Weyerhaeuser now assumed complete control of the booming company, and reorganized. He brought his many resources and talents to bear on the problem of supplying the Mississippi market.

During the next two years Weyerhaeuser and his associates in the Mississippi Logging Company contracted for logs on the upper Chippewa. Thanks to tactics of the Eau Claire group, few of them got through. Yet the Mississippi Company now had something the Eau Claire group couldn't fight forever—seemingly unlimited capital. Weyerhaeuser could put more and more logs into the river, and *all* of them couldn't be stopped upstream.

Eau Claire millowners fought back in the Legislature and in the courts. They tried to get the booming company outlawed on the ground that it obstructed navigation of the Chippewa. They persuaded steamboat owners to sue the company for damage done by floating logs. In the meantime Weyerhaeuser continued to send logs down the river.

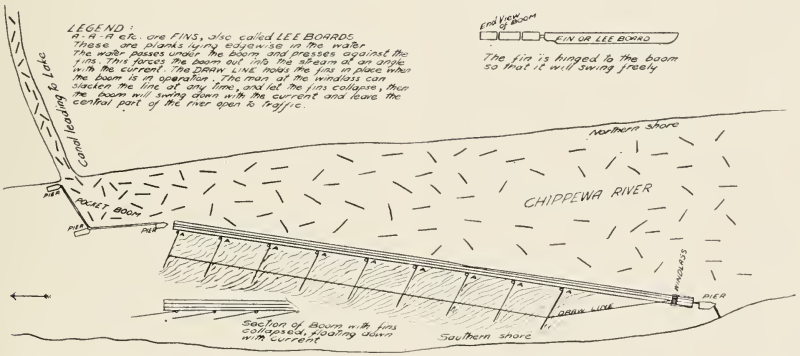
Then the Mississippi Logging Company started to buy pine lands in the Chippewa valley. By 1879 four hundred men were employed in its rafting works alone, which indicates that many of the logs were finally getting through the Beef Slough. The next year the Eau Claire people gave up. They met with the Mississippi Company and a log-sharing plan was agreed upon. Timber cutting and transportation in the valley were to be largely controlled by the same parent company, regardless of where the logs went. Thus the supply would be regulated, everyone would get a share, and it might be possible to hold logs and wait for good markets.[8]

Railroads and Lumbering

While the Beef Slough controversy raged, railroads entered the logging picture in western Wisconsin.

In 1860 the Chicago and Northwestern had extended its line from Oshkosh to Green Bay. Eleven years later that town was connected with

Diagram of a boom.


LEGEND:
A, B, C etc. are FINS, also called LEE BOARDS.
These are planks laying edgewise in the water.
The water passes under the boom and presses against the fins. This forces the boom out into the stream at an angle with the current. The DRAW LINE holds the fins in place when the boom is in operation. The man at the windlass can slacken the line at any time, and let the fins collapse, then the boom will swing down with the current and leave the central part of the river open to traffic.
End View of Boom
FIN OR LEE BOARD
The fin is hinged to the boom so that it will swing freely
Canal leading to Lake
Northern Shore
CHIPPEWA RIVER
POCKET BOOM
PILE
PILE
WINDLASS
PIER
DRAW LINE
Section of Boom with fins collapsed, floating down with current
Southern shore

Menominee. The Wisconsin Central completed a line from Milwaukee to Ashland in 1877 and built branches to Green Bay and Portage. A few years before, in 1874, the Green Bay and Minnesota Railroad ran from Green Bay to the Mississippi. Sawmills went up along the routes, and lumbermen quickly took advantage of the new systems.

Lumber Companies did what they could to encourage railroad building. Lumber was sold at reduced prices, local governments were persuaded to give financial aid, and stock was purchased in the various companies. Lumbermen used their influence in Congress and in state legislatures to get government subsidies for the railroads. Thousands of acres of good pine land were granted to help pay railroad construction costs.

In December 1868, the Eau Claire *Free Press* joyously reported "The West Wisconsin Railway—the First Section From Tomah to Black River Falls is Opened."

> The road is built into the flourishing town of Black River Falls, the outlet of the Black River lumbering section. This winter, the bridge over the river will be built, the deep cut dug, and preparations made for building the road through to Eau Claire. The distance from Black River Falls to Eau Claire is 58 miles, and if built as we are told it will be, another fall will open up to Milwaukee ninety miles of new road, penetrating one of the best sections of our State.

It took a little less than two years to complete that 58 mile stretch. In August 1870, Eau Claire had one of the biggest celebrations in the community's history.

"Arrival of the Cars at Eau Claire! Ten Thousand People Present!! Distinguished Guests from Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota and Our Own State, in Attendance," boomed the *Free Press,* in headlines reserved only for war and presidential assassinations. The Governor of Wisconsin, Lucius Fairchild, was there, as well as railroad officials of all kinds. Rousing speeches on railroads and the rosy future of Eau Claire were made. People ate heartily. There was dancing in the streets. The Event was grand, crowed the *Free Press.*

> Yes, *grand,* we say. Can we use a less significant term as descriptive of a railroad outlet that brings us within forty-eight hours ride of New York City? Ten hours travel lands us at the Cream City of our State [Milwaukee]; twelve hours time drops us at the busy western metropolis of Chicago, and in short joins us as a link with the great iron band that traverses the entire world; and is to unite us with the Northern Pacific road, that will whistle by our very doors in a few short months, and be known as the Grand Trunk Road from East to West, tapping as it will the richest country in mineral wealth ever yet surveyed for settlement.

Railroads had other influences. They made it easier to get men and supplies into the woods. Gradually the lumber industry swung to year-round production, for as railroads were built into the pineries it was no longer necessary to depend so much on the spring drive. Pine lands too remote from driving streams now

came into production. Local manufacturing of wood products, such as doors, sashes, furniture and so forth increased. Craftsmen had formerly supplied the home market quite easily. Now a wider market opened, the state and the nation, and factory production became profitable. Using wood for fuel, ties, buildings and cars, railroads were also good customers of the lumber industry. Railroad expansion meant increased business all around.

There was no sudden end to rafting logs and lumber, however. Almost until the end of large-scale lumbering in the Chipewa valley, rafts were sent to the Mississippi. Although at first jubilant over railroads, lumbermen soon discovered that the owners could often fix rates to please themselves.

The resources and position of the Chippewa valley in relation to the huge lumber market west of the Mississippi were unsurpassed. Lumbermen there wanted low railroad rates in order to take full advantage of their position. Other lumbermen, like those in eastern Wisconsin and Michigan who shipped through Chicago, wanted higher rates for the Chippewa shippers, so competition between the regions would be more even. Shipments out of Chicago were given lower preferred rates over those out of the Chippewa valley, even though the distance between the two points and Omaha and Denver was about the same.

The issue was never really settled. In good times lumbermen didn't object to high rates—often they complained that railroads didn't furnish enough cars to service them. When the market was low, and rates increased expenses, they resorted to rafting whenever possible.[9]

End of an Era

Railroads extended the market for lumber and wood products, but at the same time contributed to the more rapid depletion of the forests. The high rate of cutting continued, and spark-belching locomotives chugged through the pineries, carrying logs out and increasing the incidence of fire.

In the mid-1880's, estimates of how long Wisconsin forests would last varied from seven to thirty years. The peak was still ahead—over four billion board feet were cut in 1892, during the years Wisconsin lumber production led the entire country. Yet the end was already in sight. Many companies were cutting hardwoods, hemlock and cedar, which they formerly had disdainfully passed over. Some capitalists, Weyerhaeuser and others, were investing money in Southern and Western pine.

Population growth in the chief production centers slowed down. Ashland County, which had increased almost 1200% during the 1880's, grew only 9% during the '90's. Eau Claire County, whose population had tripled in the sixties and doubled in the seventies, went up only about 3% in the nineties.

Toward century's end, many cities and villages began to wonder what would become of them when the timber was gone and the sawmills closed down. Some, like Eau Claire, worked hard to attract industries that would utilize as much of pine and other logs as possible. By 1892

Rafting on the Chippewa.

the town had factories making furniture, trunks, barrels and staves, carriages and wagons, two breweries, two book binderies, as well as nine active sawmills.

Conservation sentiment, the spark of which had been struck as early as the 1860's, but to which few had paid much attention until the '90's, became stronger. National and state governments took steps to set aside forest lands. More attention was given to using waste products and to more efficient cutting methods and use of wood itself. The United States Forest Products Laboratory was established in Madison shortly after the twentieth century began, in 1909. The only institution of its kind in the country, it was to be used for scientific wood research.

More and more, people thought of what might have been, how much timber might have been saved for future use, had better logging and sawmilling practices been followed. It was thought, for example, that perhaps a billion more board feet of lumber could have been saved by using thin band saws instead of the thick circular ones.

Looking at the stump-dotted, burned over pine lands, which stood as a monument to rapid cutting and wasteful methods, and huge profits for some operators, many people were less inclined to applaud the "Lumber Barons." They tended to forget that while the pine was being cut, the market clamored for the very best product. It was forgotten that farmers had wanted the land

quickly cleared. People also overlooked how the lumber barons represented the fulfillment of the American dream of "rags to riches," and how firmly everyone had been convinced that the forests would last forever anyway.

Little pine was replaced. County governments, seeing a last chance at income off much of the cutover land, slapped heavy taxes on it. Lumber companies complained they couldn't afford to plant seedlings, wait fifty or more years to harvest the trees, and still make a profit while paying such taxes. Some might say it is doubtful that they would have replaced the trees anyway, with such rich forests lying ready for the axe and saw in the South and the Far West. When they couldn't control local governments and keep the taxes down, lumbermen usually let the land revert to those governments, and moved out. Or they sold the land to foreign immigrants, often giving the impression that the land was cheap and productive as a lure to get people in. Actually, much of the land would grow little save trees, and the plight of many who bought land and tried to farm it later presented a difficult problem for local and state governments.

Pine was still cut, sawmills still operated, but nothing like in a time not far past. The days of tremendous seasons of cutting and huge log drives were over. Then in 1910 the *Chippewa Herald noted,*

> For the first time in three-fourths of a century no logs have been banked along the Chippewa River and its tributaries, to be floated to the mills along its banks. This year marks the end of the big logging operations in this vicinity, and at the end of the summer almost all the mills along the Chippewa will close for all time.

Mills were and had been closing on the Menominee and the Wolf, on the Black, the Wisconsin and the St. Croix. Large-scale lumbering had ended in Michigan some time before; it would be over in Minnesota a short time later.[10]

In the process of changing vast forests into boards and mounds of sawdust, nineteenth century Wisconsin lumbering had scarred the land, and left the people of the state with many problems of conservation, stream pollution, erosion, and the settlement of peoples. Lumbermen, with railroad companies, had held a tight rein on the State Legislature. For many years no laws detrimental to lumber companies were passed. Yet at the same time lumbering had brought many people from other states and from foreign countries into Wisconsin. Lumbering had brought wealth to cities, farms and governments. It had supplied materials that built the cities and farms on the treeless Western plains. Now the industry had passed. Historians could begin to sort out its influence and contributions, its sins and shortcomings, and try to find its meaning for Wisconsin, and for other Middlewestern states.

NOTES

[1] *Chippewa Herald,* April 7, 1882, quoted in Robert F. Fries, *Empire in Pine, the Story of Lumbering in Wisconsin* (Madison, 1951), 231-32.

[2] Quoted in Stewart H. Holbrook, *Holy Old Mackinaw, A Natural History of the Lumberjack* (New York, 1945), 75. (With permission of Macmillan Company).

[3] Fries, *Empire in Pine,* 8-23.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] Material on logging operations from *Ibid.,* 25-60; Issac Stephenson, *Recollections of a Long Life* (Chicago, 1915), 30-130; John E. Nelligan, *Life of a Lumberman* (Madison, 1929), 35-64.

[6] On the drive, Holbrook, *Holy Old Mackinaw,* 53–71 (Quotes from here with permission of Macmillan Company). Fries, *Empire in Pine,* 41–59; Nelligan, *Life of a Lumberman,* 133–66.

[7] On milling and rafting, Fries, *Empire in Pine,* 60-83; Wilbur H. Glover, "Lumber Rafting on the Wisconsin River," *Wisconsin Magazine of History,* 25:155-77; 308-24 1941-1942).

[8] Material on Beef Slough from Fries, *Empire in Pine,* 142-54; Eau Claire *Free Press,* January 30, February 20, May 7, 1868; Eau Claire *Telegram,* April 22, 1918.

[9] Material on railroads from Fries, *Empire in Pine,* 84-99; Eau Claire *Free Press,* December 17, 1868; August 18, 1870.

[10] Summary material from Fries, *Empire in Pine,* 239-254; Mary Dopp, "Geographic Influences in the Development of Wisconsin," American Geographic Society *Bulletin,* 45:401-920 (1913), 744-48.

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The most outstanding work to date on lumbering in Wisconsin and its various influences is Robert F. Fries, *Empire in Pine,* published by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin in 1951.

John E. Nelligan's *Life of a Lumberman,* a very useful personal reminiscence, was first published in *Wisconsin Magazine of History,* 13:3-65, 131-85, 241-304 (1929-1930), and later printed in book form from the plates of the magazine. Isaac Stephenson, *Recollections of a Long Life* (Chicago, 1915), has a great deal in it about the various aspects of lumbering, as well as giving a good picture of Wisconsin politics.

Stewart Holbrook, *Holy Old Mackinaw* (New York, 1945) is very readable, and deals with lumbering in both New England and the Middlewest. and the Pacific Northwest.

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